

カリキュラムイニシアティブレポート：イマージョンプログラムが日本の英語教育に与える影響

Curriculum Initiative Report: The Impact of an Immersion Program on English Language Teaching in Japan

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要旨

現在の第二言語習得では、言語の仕組みを学ぶだけではなく実際の言語使用活動を通して言語能力を高めることが重視されてきている。その一環として、使用言語そのものを第二言語とした教育カリキュラム、「イマージョンプログラム」の導入が積極的に行われるようになってきた。本稿は、言語教育に用いられるイマージョンプログラムとは何かを、歴史的背景、教授法、運営方針に焦点を当て考察したうえで、実際の英語イマージョンプログラムの導入法を事例を挙げ紹介し、比較検討を行う。

1. Overview of an Immersion Program

An immersion program is a form of bilingual program established for language teaching and learning. An immersion program requires at least 50 per cent of the school curriculum to be taught through the medium of a target language. In an immersion program, students learn the target language through using it rather than learning language as an object. Also, Read (1999) states that students in an immersion program are in a 'language bath' and they obtain intensive exposure to the target language. The target audience of this program is language learners, especially children and early teens.

The first immersion program was created as a new type of language education by English-speaking parents in St Lambert, Canada and a team of psychologists from McGill University in order to teach French in a kindergarten in 1965. This was epoch-making and successful, therefore this immersion program was followed by a Spanish immersion at UCLA in the early 1970s. It became widespread and it is now used worldwide in areas of second or foreign language education.

There exist various models for an immersion program. According to the age of participants in the program, it is divided into three categories; early immersion, delayed immersion, and late immersion.

1. Early immersion

An immersion program which starts from kindergarten or Year 1 is called early immersion.

2. Delayed immersion

Delayed immersion refers to an immersion program in which students are Year 4 or 5. Students who participate in the delayed immersion program tend to learn a target language before starting this program in order to easily adjust themselves into an immersion program.

3. Late immersion

An immersion program which starts in Year 7 or Year 10 is categorised as late immersion. Similar to delayed immersion, students who take part in late immersion were most likely to study a second or foreign language in elementary schools.

These three immersion programs are further divided into two, 'full' or 'total', and 'partial'. Full or total immersion refers to the curriculum, which is fully conducted in the second or foreign language throughout the whole year, whereas partial immersion provides approximately 50 per cent of instructions in the target language.

Swain (1981) and other researchers state that there are several principles in order to carry out an immersion program.

- An immersion program requires at least 50 per cent of the school curriculum to be taught through the medium of a target language. As well as in a language class, students learn and communicate in a target language in other subjects' classes.
- An immersion program involves a content-based instruction and all instructions are in the target language. As a result, students learn through the target language rather than learning about it and they use the second language exclusively.
- In an immersion program, teachers only speak the target language and they do not repeat what they said in the students' first language.
- An immersion program provides a non-threatening learning environment. Error correction and grammatical accuracy is not emphasised in an immersion program, and teachers do not correct students' grammatical mistakes when students' language skills are still in progress.
- The earlier the access to the target language the better, in order to learn language naturally.

Furthermore, according to Curtain & Pesola (1988), four mutual purposes exist in an immersion program. An immersion program is constructed to:

- achieve communication skills in a second language
- maintain the first language proficiency and improve it as well as develop second language skills
- learn suitable content of subjects in each corresponding level

- learn and understand another language and respect their culture without losing respect for their own culture

The approach to teaching the target language varies depending on which model of immersion program is used in the school. However, when an early immersion program is carried out, the school needs not only to stress the ways they teach the target language and its culture, but also to ensure that the students understand the importance of their first language and culture.

2. Implementation of an Immersion Program into School Practice

As mentioned previously, an immersion program is for language teaching and learning, so it can be applied to any language acquisition. In this report, English immersion at two Japanese junior high and senior high schools where the immersion program is conducted, are used as examples. These are Katoh Gakuen and Seiko Gakuen. Both schools have immersion programs from kindergarten to high school levels. However, this report will only focus on junior high and senior high school levels of English immersion programs in Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior High and Senior High School, and Seiko Gakuen Junior High School. It is also important to note that this report is based on information collected in June, 2003.

2.1. Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior High and Senior High School

Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior High and Senior High School is located in Shizuoka prefecture, about 120 kilometres south of Tokyo, Japan. An English partial immersion program was started at the Junior High School in 1998 and it was the first Japanese school where an English immersion program was incorporated into school practice. At the Senior High School, an English immersion program started in 2001. As of April 2003, there were 69 students at the Junior High School and 53 students at the Senior High School taking the English immersion program. There were 27 students in Year 7, 18 students in Year 8, 24 students in Year 9, 13 students in Year 10, 22 students in Year 11 and 18 students in Year 12.

At Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior High School, about 50 per cent of the curriculum is conducted in English and the other 50 per cent is conducted in Japanese. Mathematics, Geography, Politics, General Science, Computers, Art, and Homeroom are conducted in English. In contrast, Japanese, History, Home Economics, Technical Art, Music, and Physical Education are taught in Japanese. (See Appendix 1 for the Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior High and Senior High School timetable.) On the other hand, all classes except Japanese class are conducted in English at Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Senior High School. It works out to about 83 per cent of the school curriculum being instructed in English. Due to the huge input of English from other subjects as an immersion program, everyday English language classes focus on grammar, writing, speaking, and reading at both schools.

There is an additional Japanese language class on Saturday every fortnight. This class is conducted for students to build up their Japanese terminology for specific subjects such as General Science, Geography and Mathematics. In doing so, students will not be disadvantaged in nationwide examinations which are instructed and written in Japanese.

The first and second year students of the Junior High School have an opportunity to have a short study-abroad experience in New Zealand or America. This activity provides students with a full immersion experience in an English speaking country. This trip is an optional activity and students can choose whether they want to go or not. This flexibility allows students to consider their own curiosity, safety and financial matters. Students who decide to go on this trip can select which of the two countries they want to go to. On this trip, they will stay with host families and study with local students at a secondary school in New Zealand or Iowa, America for about a month. Students can practice their English with native speakers in real situations. Similarly, there is an overseas experience plan for Year 10 students at the Senior High School.

There are seven teachers in the English immersion program at Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior and Senior High School. The requirements for being a teacher in an English immersion program are to:

- be a native speaker of English,
- have more than five years English teaching experience in an English speaking country,
- have experience in teaching English to non-English speaking background students, and
- have an understanding of Japanese language and culture

Because of these strict requirements, students will be able to acquire English in the ideal environment.

Feedback from the schools on the immersion program has been positive. A co-ordinator of this program at Katoh Gakuen stated that “This is an excellent program and students will not be stressed with learning English, because they absorb English as a tool of communication, not as a subject.” He went on to say that “Many people worry about students’ competency of Japanese language, but don’t worry. Student will have identity as Japanese, and they can think and see things internationally. It is the real international education.”

2.2. Seiko Gakuen

Seiko Gakuen is located in Ohjin-cho, Tokushima prefecture, about 750 kilometres west of Tokyo, Japan. At Seiko Gakuen Junior High School, the English immersion program is called I.E.C. (International English and Culture) course. The I.E.C. course started at this school in 2000. Unlike Katoh Gakuen, Seiko Gakuen has fewer subjects students learn in English. English activity, Computers, and Physical Education are conducted in English. Teachers in the I.E.C course are all native speakers of English and all eight teachers are Australians working full-time.

There are 10 hours of English classes per week, and these English classes are divided into three

time systems; English activity time, culture time, and grammar time. These classes are conducted in order to effectively acquire an understanding of multiculturalism and of the target language. English activity time focuses on improving students' speaking skills. Culture time focuses on teaching cross-cultural communication and understanding, and reading and research skills. Grammar time focuses on improving grammar and sentence-structure skills. Grammar classes are taught by a Japanese teacher in Japanese in order to prepare for high school and university examinations.

Although Katoh Gakuen's overseas trip is optional, every student in the I.E.C. course at Seiko Gakuen Junior High School goes on an overseas trip in order to experience full immersion. In September every year, all Year 8 students go to Australia to try out their English skills in a real environment. They stay in Queensland for about three weeks. They study with local students for two weeks at South Queensland International College in Jimboomba, Queensland. The last week of their stay in Australia, they explore the city in Brisbane and Warner Brothers Movie World and Dream World on the Gold Coast. Each student has a 'buddy' who looks after him or her for the three weeks of their study. This is a great opportunity for students to interact with native speakers of their own age.

Seiko Gakuen is still new to the immersion program and there is not a lot of information available. It seems that this school needs to more effectively disseminate information about the school's curriculum, and teachers' and students' comments about the I.E.C. course.

3. Concluding Discussions

An immersion program enables students to learn English as a second or foreign language effectively, since it inevitably involves them in an English speaking environment. When children are small, it is not easy to go to a foreign country to learn the second or foreign language. It is therefore a great opportunity to experience an English surrounded environment within one's own country.

However, my biggest concern about this program is that students may have low levels of understanding in other subjects when they compete with students from an ordinary program. High school and university entrance examinations are still considered to be very important in Japan, and most schools are teaching to pass the examinations. If students study about half of their school curriculum in the medium of the second or foreign language, there is a possibility that their learning could be behind that of the students who study their school curriculum in their first language.

Also, unfortunately, an immersion program is only introduced as a private school curriculum in Japan, and therefore many students who are interested in this program do not have an opportunity to study it. It is necessary for the Japanese government to consider operating an immersion program at government schools and make it more accessible to students from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Traditional English teaching which is focused on grammar and sentence structure is gradually

changing in Japan. Recently interaction competence, including sociolinguistic, sociocultural and grammatical one, has been considered more important in the acquisition of English. Although the immersion program significantly enhances such competence in educational settings, it is still a recent innovation in Japan and thus needs to be more actively promoted and publicised. In doing so, the government and the public will realise that an immersion program could be another option for language learning and teaching.

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Appendix 1

Table: The Classes Taught Either in Japanese or English at Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior and Senior High School in 2003 and 2004.

		Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese
Social Study	Geography	English	English	---	---	---	---
	History	Japanese	Japanese	---	English	---	---
	Economics	---	---	Japanese	---	---	---
	Politics	---	---	English	---	---	---
	Civics	---	---	---	English	---	---
	World History	---	---	---	---	English	English
	Mathematics	English	Japanese	Japanese	English	English	English
	Science	English	English	English	English	---	---
	Chemistry	---	---	---	---	English	English
	Technical arts and Home economics/Computers	Japanese / English	Japanese / English	Japanese / English	English / English	---	---
	Physical Education	Japanese	Japanese	Japanese	English	English	English
	Music/Arts	Japanese/ English	Japanese/ English	Japanese/ English	Japanese/ English	---	---
	Physics/ Visual Arts/ Chinese	---	---	---	---	English/ English/ Chinese	English/ English/ Chinese

Resource: “The bilingual courses at Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior and Senior High School”, (2003, June 10), (Bilingual Course Club), Available: <http://shizuoka.cool.ne.jp/bcc51244/GyoshuBC.htm> (Accessed: 2003, June 10)